

PROLOGUE TO HELLAS

BY

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY



NOW FIRST SEPARATELY PRINTED

LONDON

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

1886

PR5422
D76A2
W58
1886

1 of 20 copies

21/-

Osborn Walford, Esq.

With kindest regards from

Thos. J. Wise

8/11-86.

15 20 Copies

my

PROLOGUE TO HELLAS

*The issue of this book
is limited to Twenty copies.*



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY,
FROM THE ORIGINAL PICTURE BY CLINT.

PROLOGUE TO HELLAS

BY

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY

RICHARD GARNETT

EDITED AND ANNOTATED

BY

THOMAS J. WISE

LONDON

FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION ONLY

1886



C O N T E N T S

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY NOTE	11
PROLOGUE TO HELLAS	15
POSTSCRIPT BY DR. GARNETT	29
NOTES	33



INTRODUCTORY NOTE



NOTE
ON THE
PROLOGUE TO HELLAS¹

BY
RICHARD GARNETT.

MRS. SHELLEY informs us, in her note on the "Prometheus Unbound," that at the time of her husband's arrival in Italy, he meditated the production of three dramas.² One of these was the "Prometheus" itself; the second, a drama on the subject of Tasso's madness; the third one founded on the Book of Job; "of which," she adds, "he never abandoned the idea." That this was the case will be apparent from the following newly-discovered fragment, which may have been, as I have on the whole preferred to describe it, an unfinished prologue to "Hellas," or perhaps the original sketch of that work, discarded for the existing more dramatic, but less

ambitious version, for which the "Persae" of Æschylus evidently supplied the model. It is written in the same book as the original MS. of "Hellas," and so blended with this as to be only separable after very minute examination. Few even of Shelley's rough drafts have proved more difficult to decipher or connect; numerous chasms will be observed, which, with every diligence, it has proved impossible to fill up; the correct reading of many printed lines is far from certain; and the imperfection of some passages is such as to have occasioned their entire omission. Nevertheless, I am confident that the unpolished and mutilated remnant will be accepted as a worthy emanation of one of Shelley's sublimest moods, and a noble earnest of what he might have accomplished could he have executed his original design of founding a drama on the Book of Job. Weak health, variable spirits, above all, the absence of encouragement, must be enumerated as chief among the causes which have deprived our literature of so magnificent a work.



PROLOGUE TO HELLAS



PROLOGUE TO HELLAS.

HERALD OF ETERNITY.

It is the day when all the sons of God
Wait in the roofless senate-house, whose floor
Is Chaos, and the immovable abyss
Frozen by His steadfast word to hyaline

* * * * *

The shadow of God, and delegate
Of that before whose breath the universe
Is as a print of dew.

Hierarchs and kings

Who from your thrones pinnacled on the past
Sway the reluctant present, ye who sit
Pavilioned on the radiance or the gloom
Of mortal thought, which like an exhalation
Steaming from earth, conceals the of heaven
Which gave it birth, assemble here
Before your Father's throne ; the swift decree

Yet hovers, and the fiery incarnation
 Is yet withheld, clothed in which it shall

annul

The fairest of those wandering isles that gem
 The sapphire space of interstellar air,³
 That green and azure sphere, that earth inwraught
 Less in the beauty of its tender light
 Than in an atmosphere of living spirit
 Which interpenetrating all the

it rolls from realm to realm

And age to age, and in its ebb and flow
 Impels the generations
 To their appointed place,
 Whilst the high Arbiter
 Beholds the strife, and at the appointed time
 Sends his decrees veiled in eternal

Within the circuit of this pendant orb
 There lies an antique region, on which fell
 The dews of thought in the world's golden dawn
 Earliest and most benign, and from it sprung
 Temples and cities and immortal forms
 And harmonies of wisdom and of song,
 And thoughts, and deeds worthy of thoughts so fair
 And when the sun of its dominion failed,
 And when the winter of its glory came,

The winds that stript it bare blew on and swept
 That dew into the utmost wildernesses
 In wandering clouds of sunny rain that thawed
 The unmaternal bosom of the North.
 Haste, sons of God, for ye beheld,
 Reluctant, or consenting, or astonished,
 The stern decrees go forth, which heaped on Greece
 Ruin and degradation and despair.
 A fourth now waits : assemble, sons of God,
 To speed or to prevent or to suspend,
 If, as ye dream, such power be not withheld,
 The unaccomplished destiny.

* * * * *

CHORUS.

The curtain of the Universe
 Is rent and shattered,
 The splendour-wingèd worlds disperse
 Like wild doves scattered.

Space is roofless and bare,
 And in the midst a cloudy shrine,
 Dark amid thrones of light.
 In the blue glow of hyaline
 Golden worlds revolve and shine

In flight
 From every point of the Infinite,
 Like a thousand dawns on a single night
 The splendours rise and spread ;
 And through thunder and darkness dread
 Light and music are radiated,
 And in their pavilioned chariots led
 By living wings high overhead
 The giant Powers move,
 Gloomy or bright as the thrones they fill.

* * * * *

A chaos of light and motion
 Upon that glassy ocean.

* * * * *

The senate of the Gods is met,
 Each in his rank and station set ;
 There is silence in the spaces—
 Lo ! Satan, Christ, and Mahomet
 Start from their places !

* * * * *

CHRIST.

Almighty Father !
 Low-kneeling at the feet of Destiny
 * * * * *
 There are two fountains in which spirits weep
 When mortals err, Discord and Slavery named,

And with their bitter dew two Destinies
 Filled each their irrevocable urns ; the third,
 Fiercest and mightiest, mingled both, and added
 Chaos and Death, and slow Oblivion's lymph,
 And hate and terror, and the poisoned rain

* * * * *

The Aurora of the nations. By this brow
 Whose pores wept tears of blood, by these wide wounds,
 By this imperial crown of agony,
 By infamy and solitude and death,
 For this I underwent, and by the pain
 Of pity for those who would for me
 The unremembered joy of a revenge,
 For this I felt—by Plato's sacred light,
 Of which my spirit was a burning morrow—
 By Greece and all she cannot cease to be,
 Her quenchless words, sparks of immortal truth,
 Stars of all night—her harmonies and forms,
 Echoes and shadows of what Love adores
 In thee, I do compel thee, send forth Fate,
 Thy irrevocable child : let her descend ⁴
 A seraph-wingèd victory [arrayed]
 In tempest of the omnipotence of God
 Which sweeps through all things.

From hollow leagues, from Tyranny which arms
 Adverse miscreeds and emulous anarchies
 To stamp, as on a wingèd serpent's seed,
 Upon the name of Freedom ; from the storm
 Of faction, which like earthquake shakes and sickens
 The solid heart of enterprise ; from all
 By which the holiest dreams of highest spirits
 Are stars beneath the dawn

She shall arise

Victorious as the world arose from Chaos !
 And as the Heavens and the Earth arrayed
 Their presence in the beauty and the light
 Of thy first smile, O Father, as they gather
 The spirit of thy love which paves for them
 Their path o'er the abyss, till every sphere
 Shall be one living Spirit, so shall Greece—

SATAN.

Be as all things beneath the empyrean,
 Mine ! Art thou eyeless like old Destiny,
 Thou mockery-king, crowned with a wreath of thorns ?
 Whose sceptre is a reed, the broken reed
 Which pierces thee ! whose throne a chair of scorn ;
 For seest thou not beneath this crystal floor

The innumerable worlds of golden light
 Which are my empire, and the least of them
 which thou would'st redeem from me ?

Know'st thou not them my portion ?

Or wouldst rekindle the strife

Which our great Father then did arbitrate

When he assigned to his competing sons

Each his apportioned realm ?

 Thou Destiny,

Thou who art mailed in the omnipotence

Of Him who sends thee forth, whate'er thy task,

Speed, spare not to accomplish, and be mine

Thy trophies, whether Greece again become

The fountain in the desert whence the earth

Shall drink of freedom, which shall give it strength

To suffer, or a gulph of hollow death

To swallow all delight, all life, all hope.

Go, thou Vicegerent of my will, no less

Than of the Father's ; but lest thou shouldst faint,

The wingèd hounds, Famine and Pestilence,

Shall wait on thee, the hundred-forkèd snake,

Insatiate Superstition, still shall

The earth behind thy steps, and War shall hover

Above, and Fraud shall gape below, and Change

Shall flit before thee on her dragon wings,

Convulsing and consuming,⁵ and I add

Three vials of the tears which demons weep
 When virtuous spirits through the gate of Death
 Pass triumphing over the thorns of life,
 Sceptres and crowns, mitres and swords and snares,
 Trampling in scorn, like Him and Socrates.
 The first is Anarchy; when Power and Pleasure,
 Glory and science and security,
 On Freedom hang like fruit on the green tree,
 Then pour it forth, and men shall gather ashes.
 The second Tyranny—

CHRIST.

Obdurate spirit!

Thou seest but the Past in the To-come.
 Pride is thy error and thy punishment.
 Boast not thine empire, dream not that thy worlds
 Are more than furnace-sparks or rainbow-drops
 Before the Power that wields and kindles them.
 True greatness asks not space, true excellence
 Lives in the Spirit of all things that live,
 Which lends it to the worlds thou callest thine.

* * * * *

MAHOMET.

* * * * *

Haste thou and fill the waning crescent
 With beams as keen as those which pierced the shadow

Of Christian night rolled back upon the West
 When the orient moon of Islam rode in triumph
 From Tmolus to the Acroceraunian snow.⁶

* * * * *

Wake, thou Word

Of God, and from the throne of Destiny
 Even to the utmost limit of thy way
 May Triumph

* * * * *

Be thou a curse on them whose creed
 Divides and multiplies the most high God.

1821.

[The following fragments appear to have been originally written for
 "Hellas."]

Fairest of the Destinies,
 Disarray thy dazzling eyes:
 Keener far their lightnings are
 Than the wingèd [bolts] thou bearest,
 And the smile thou wearest
 Wraps thee as a star
 Is wrapt in light.

Could Arethuse to her forsaken urn
 From Alpheus and the bitter Doris run,
 Or could the morning shafts of purest light
 Again into the quivers of the Sun
 Be gathered—could one thought from its wild flight
 Return into the temple of the brain
 Without a change, without a stain,—
 Could aught that is, ever again
 Be what it once has ceased to be,
 Greece might again be free !

A star has fallen upon the earth
 'Mid the benighted nations,
 A quenchless atom of immortal light,
 A living spark of Night,
 A cresset shaken from the constellations.
 Swifter than the thunder fell
 To the heart of Earth, the well
 Where its pulses flow and beat,
 And unextinct in that cold source
 Burns, and on course
 Guides the sphere which is its prison,
 Like an angelic spirit pent
 In a form of mortal birth,

Till, as a spirit half arisen
Shatters its charnel, it has rent,
In the rapture of its mirth,
The thin and painted garment of the Earth,
Ruining its chaos—a fierce breath
Consuming all its forms of living death.



217

217

POSTSCRIPT

[The text in this section is extremely faint and illegible. It appears to be a list or a series of notes, possibly containing names and dates, but the characters are too light to transcribe accurately.]



POSTSCRIPT *

BY

RICHARD GARNETT

BESIDES the evident imitation of the Book of Job, the resemblance of the first draft of "Hellas" to the machinery of Dryden's intended epic is to be noted. "He gives," says Johnson, summarising Dryden's preface to his translation of Juvenal, "an account of the design which he had once formed to write an epic poem on the actions either of Arthur or the Black Prince. He considered the epic as necessarily involving some kind of supernatural agency, and had imagined a new kind of contest between

* This *Postscript* was not included in the *Relics of Shelley* volume, where the Introductory Note originally appeared. By the kindness of Dr. Garnett the additional passage is now printed.

the guardian angels of kingdoms, of whom he conceived that each might be represented zealous for his charge without any intended opposition to the purposes of the Supreme Being, of which all created minds must in part be ignorant.

“This is the most reasonable scheme of celestial interposition that ever was formed.”

R. G.



NOTES



NOTES.

(1) This Note was first printed in the *Relics of Shelley*,* 1862, p. 3, where the *Prologue to Hellas* itself originally appeared (pp. 4-13); the latter having in that year been "deciphered by Dr. Garnett during the course of his fruitful search amongst the Shelley Manuscripts preserved at Boscombe Manor." The volume—*Relics of Shelley*—is full of most valuable and interesting matter given from original and authoritative sources, amongst which the *Fragments of the Adonais*,† *The Magic Plant*, *Orpheus*, *Fiordispina*, and

* *Relics of Shelley*. | Edited by | Richard Garnett. | London: | Edward Moxon & Co., Dover Street. | 1862. Small octavo, pp. i-xvi and 1-191. The whole of the fragments in Prose and Verse included in this book, were reprinted in Mr. Buxton Forman's Library Edition of Shelley's Works; and the Poetical portions re-appear in all his separate editions of the Poetry.

† By the courtesy of Dr. Garnett, these *Fragments*—both of the Poem and of the Preface—were printed in full in the Introduction to the Facsimile Reprint of the first edition (4to, Pisa, 1821) of the *Adonais*, issued by the Shelley Society (*Publications, Second Series, No. 1*) in March of the present year. They will be found on pp. 19-22 of that Reprint.

the *Lines written in the Bay of Lerici* hold most prominent positions. But the little book contains no pages so attractive, or possessed of such intrinsic worth, as those which place before us the vivid and powerful lines of this marvellous *Prologue*; the recovery of which is matter for lasting congratulation amongst the delighted admirers of the poet's wondrous skill.

(2) The following is the extract from Mrs. Shelley's Note in question:—

“He [Shelley] went directly to Italy, avoiding even
 “Paris, and did not make any pause till he arrived at
 “Milan. * * * * * The poetical spirit within him speedily
 “revived with all the power and with more than all the
 “beauty of his first attempts. He meditated three subjects
 “as the groundwork for lyrical Dramas. One was the story
 “of Tasso; of this a slight fragment of a song of Tasso
 “remains.* The other was one founded on the book of

* First printed in the *Posthumous Poems*, 1824, p. 264. When writing this passage, Mrs. Shelley seems to have overlooked another small portion of the projected drama, which was happily preserved. Part of one scene was included by Dr. Garnett in the *Relics of Shelley*, pp. 26-27; and that much more must have been produced may, I imagine, fairly be concluded from the Poet's own words:—“I have devoted,” he wrote from Milan, April 20, 1818, “this summer * * * to the composition of a tragedy on the subject of Tasso's madness; which I find upon inspection is, if properly treated, admirably dramatic and poetical.” Of course this may mean simply that Shelley had decided upon devoting the summer, then only in its spring, to the purpose named; and he may afterwards, for reasons of his own, have abandoned the design. Still the passage is sufficiently uncertain in its wording to admit of an indulgence in the belief that the work was proceeded with at some length, and that a far larger portion of the projected drama was produced than the fragments now remaining would alone lead us to suppose.

But Shelley was not the only poet to be moved by Tasso's doleful tale. We remember Byron, and what *he* thought upon the theme, and how he made it immortal in his touching *Lament*. (*The Lament of Tasso*. | By Lord Byron. | London: | John Murray, Albemarle-Street. 1817. Octavo,

“Job, which he never abandoned in idea, but of which no trace remains among his papers. The third was the ‘Prometheus Unbound.’ The Greek tragedians were now his most familiar companions in his wanderings, and the sublime majesty of Æschylus filled him with wonder and delight. The father of Greek tragedy does not possess the pathos of Sophocles, nor the variety and tenderness of Euripides; the interest on which he founds his dramas is often elevated above human vicissitudes into the mighty passions and throes of gods and demigods—such fascinated the abstract imagination of Shelley.” (See:—*The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by Mrs. Shelley. Royal Octavo edition, 1874, pp. 125-126*).

(3) “The sapphire space of interstellar air.”

Compare with *Fragments of an Unfinished Drama*, line 27 :—

“In the dark space of interstellar air.”

(See :—*Shelley's Works, Forman's Edition, 1880. Vol. iii, p. 276.*)

(4) “. Let her descend
A seraph-wingèd victory [arrayed]
In tempest of the omnipotence of God
Which sweeps through all things.”

Compare with *Hellas*, 1822, p. 23, lines 10-14 :—

“The renovated genius of our race,
. descends
A seraph-wingèd Victory, bestriding
The tempest of the Omnipotence of God,
Which sweeps all things to their appointed doom,”

pp. 1-20). It was the appearance of Byron's work, thinks Dr. Garnett (*Relics of Shelley*, p. 26), that induced Shelley to abandon his undertaking; he being reluctant to enter into apparent competition with a friend, to whose genius his modesty (confirmed by the unanimous voice of his contemporaries), induced him to assign an unmerited pre-eminence over his own.

- (5) “. Change
 Shall flit before thee on her dragon wings,
 Convulsing and consuming,”

Compare with *Adonais* xxix, lines 7 and 8:—

“. fear and grief
Convulse us and consume us day by day,”

- (6) “Haste thou and fill the waning crescent
 With beams as keen as those which pierced the shadow
 Of Christian night rolled back upon the West
 When the orient moon of Islam rode in triumph
 From Tmolus to the Acroceraunian snow.”

Compare with *Hellas*, 1822, p. 15, lines 11–19:—

“O! miserable dawn, after a night
More glorious than the day which it usurp'd!
O, faith in God! O, power on earth! O, word
Of the great prophet, whose o'ershadowing wings
Darken'd the thrones and idols of the West,
Now bright!—For thy sake cursed be the hour,
Even as a father by an evil child,
When the Orient moon of Islam roll'd in triumph
From Caucasus to White Ceraunia!”



RICHARD CLAY & SONS,
BREAD STREET HILL, LONDON.
Bungay, Suffolk.

M 3722
P76A2
W58
1886



RICHARD CLAY & SONS,
BREAD STREET HILL, LONDON.
Wangay, Suffolk